



The World Stopped so I Could Melt with You by everybreatheverymove

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Summary: (Prompt: Mike and Eleven in an apocalyptic AU.) Unable to communicate with anyone due a broken walkie, Eleven can only listen in as Mike radios her every day and night, pleading for her to answer his call. Some three-hundred days later, she finally returns to him - their friends and family long gone.

The World Stopped so I Could Melt with You

She's never been the biggest fan of rain, never really been one for taking long walks in the middle of a downpour, for getting drenched and sick with a chill. But there's something oddly comforting, refreshing about this particular rainfall.

Maybe it's because the last time she'd stumbled through these woods under heavy rain, she'd met him; he'd found her soaked and lonely and cold, and he'd offered her a home and a lifetime of promises.

Maybe that's why this particular walk is so melancholic; because it reminds her of then, of a time when children were still mostly innocent, were still for the most part unafraid and unaware. Or, just maybe, it's because history (and fate, by proxy) has done her a kindness.

"El?"

She can only stand still in her place, watching as the young man on the wooden porch just some steps ahead of her mirrors her movements exactly.

His shoulders drop, and his hands shake - from disbelief or the cool air of the torrential downpour, she doesn't know. His eyes don't widen as they remain mud brown and umber, more sombre than her honey-tinted ones have ever been. But his lips curl, and she can feel her mouth contort into a similar shape as a smile forms on his face.

"Mike." She breathes his name, so quiet that she isn't sure she even spoke, and the raindrops running down the lengths of her fingers make all the more noise as they fall and hit the ground. Within seconds, she's pulled into his embrace, long arms wrapping around her body as though he won't ever let her go, as though he wasn't ever prepared to in the first place.

She reciprocates his affection, balling her fists up between them and holding her breath until her knuckles feel, turn white. It's comforting, the ache that follows. She slides one arm around his torso, letting him do the same, pull her into his front with urgency.

El doesn't cry, only lets herself melt into his embrace, into open arms that have been waiting for her return for some three-hundred days. She likes of feeling of being crushed, smothered with, and by, his love and attention. She likes the way the muscles of his neck tense when she reaches up to touch him, soft hands on cold flesh; she likes it when he can sense her reciprocation despite her inability to always let it show.

Moments pass between them in silence, the seemingly never-ending shower of rain keeping their still quietness from becoming one of dejection. "The others." El finally breaks the silence, pausing to swallow, to gather up wilted courage, "They're gone, aren't they?"

Mike blinks, and his brows wrinkle ever so slightly, face devoid of any emotion.

(She doesn't need an answer; she knows what that means.)

"I called you." He tells her, earnest and delicately so, "For next to a year, I tried every day. I would climb up onto the roof to boost the signal most times, but you never- You never responded." His voice dips, "No matter where the others went, I stayed. I couldn't leave knowing you might come back one day and I might not be there when you did."

"Mike."

"I wanted to make sure that you had somewhere. Or... or that you at least had *someone* to reach out to if you needed help. I couldn't-

"I heard you." She tells him suddenly, and he notices then just how wide her eyes have blown, how small her smile has shrunken, "I heard you every day." There are tears gathering in her left eye at the admission, but Mike is determined not to let them fall, to let her fall apart. "Every time."

He can only offer her the most honest of smiles, brows knitting as his lips part. No words are spoken, though, and instead of comforting her with his understanding, he wraps his arms tighter around her frame, hands finding her sides as she crumbles into his chest. She slides her face along his collarbone, all sharp and undernourished, until her

nose finds the crook of his neck, and she pulls herself up into him then; arms slipping from his hips to find his shoulders, cold hands clasping behind his neck as she urges him to hold her, keep her steady.

The rain never stops pouring, and the only other sound that Mike can make out beside their own heavy-hearted breaths is the chirping of birds, far away and off in the distance, much like the rest of humanity. El keeps herself held against him for a long while, bare fingers clutching at the back of his t-shirt, nails scratching his skin, as though it would keep her afloat were she to drown in that moment, were the floodgates to open and the water come crashing in. She holds onto him as though for dear life, as though Mike's tall, lean frame will keep her grounded if the time came for them to be torn part once again.

"Mike." She says after the silence, breaking the hum of their laboured breaths in the peacefulness of the oncoming storm. The hailstone will start soon, and then will come the thunder. The girl presses her face further into his chest for a beat, calming herself to the sound of light, dull thumping beneath his ribcage.

"It's okay." He tells her, breaking her trance, her pause, "El?" He doesn't sigh, but his eyes dim and his hands shake against her dampened flesh, and she knows he's confused.

"I couldn't talk back. It didn't." She pushes away to shake her head, strands of hair from her ponytail falling to frame her face, flushed from the rain despite her tan, "It didn't work." El ducks her gaze then, eyes focusing in on the softening pellets of dirt below her boots, "I tried to fix it."

There's a slight edge to her tone, and Mike isn't sure if she's mad at the walkie for failing her, or if she's just mad at herself for being unable to repair it. (He hopes it's the former, hopes she doesn't blame herself for any of this.)

(He hopes she doesn't blame herself for anything, for everything that has happened since he last saw her.) (He hopes she doesn't blame herself for everything since the beginning of the end, the opening of a gate.) (He hopes she doesn't blame him for being the only remaining

member of their party, their family; for being the only living reminder of their once easier, past life.)

"El." He leans his head down just slightly, rests his forehead, frontal arch, against the top of hers, breathing in the sobering smell of damp skin and storm-soaked woollen clothes. Mike lets his eyes drift to a close, and she can feel his eyelashes flutter against her skin as he murmurs a simple, "It's okay."

Withdrawing ever so gently, El places one hand on his waist, "How?" She whispers, voice already half-broken from the cold, never mind her self-pity. She grips the cotton of his black t-shirt in her fist, balling the material up with need.

Mike swallows, and she watches as his right hand smoothes from her waist to her side, to her face. He cups her cheek in his palm, thumb anxiously tracing patterns over her bottom lip as his voice quivers, eyes somehow dark yet bright and content all the same, "I understand."

"I had to stop it." El says then, as resolute as she's ever been. The tears that were once pooling in her eyes fall, and Mike wipes them away before she can feel them moisten her cheeks. (The rain does that enough; reminding her of the storm ahead, of the way their clothes stick to their skin as though they were fleshed out this way.)

His hair is longer now, she notes, watching as small curls cling to his forehead, as longer strands twist and tuck behind his ears, humid and wet from the cold and the rainfall.

"I know you did." He lets go of her face as he talks, arms lowering to hang by his sides, "That's how I knew you'd come back."

Refusing to let herself lose contact in any shape or form, to let herself go another second without touching him again, El stands up on the toes of her boots, the soiled leather wrinkling as she reaches for his face, palms firmly placed on either side of his face.

A warmth spears over her cheeks as she runs her fingers just past his hairline, tips touching as she encourages him to lean down to her height, all her weight hanging off of him. "Mike?"

She kisses him before he can even think to stop her, before his lips can fully part and he can wipe the smile from off of his face. Gently touching her mouth to his, she rests one hand against his chest, steadily stealing the pulse of his heartbeat as the rhythm of her own. He sobs, just once as his eyes close, and she can't help the smallest of cries that escape her when his hands find her hair, fingers tangling through knotted curls.

Mike pulls away a moment later - though admittedly sooner than she would have liked - and he wraps his hand around the back of her neck, the icy skin of his arm creating goosebumps along the back of her neck.

El remembers the storm then, signalled by the birds and the rain and the darkening navy blue sky, and she lifts her head to gaze over his shoulder.

The cabin is off in the distance, worser for wear than it had been the last time she'd seen it, before she'd turned her back and ventured off alone all those months ago, in the cold dead of night with no one to protect her. (She hadn't told a single soul, hadn't spoken to a single soul since.) (She hadn't informed Hop, or Nancy, or any of the few remaining members of the Party at the time.)

She'd had only the sound of his voice to keep her sane, to make her feel whole. She'd had only his voice, through the broken crackle of a damaged com, to remind her of where she belonged, and who she belonged with.

"Take me home."